

and Rescue missions, Lt. Col. Young has always been eager to serve his fellow Americans. It is my pleasure to recognize Lt. Col. Young for all his generosity. On behalf of the Third District of Colorado I would like to thank Lt. Col. Young for his generous service to his community.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF COMMISSIONING OF USS "JOHN F. KENNEDY"

**HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, April 10, 2018*

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the commissioning of the first aircraft carrier named after our 35th President of the United States, the USS *John F. Kennedy*. President John F. Kennedy began his political career as a member of this chamber and his legacy continues to this day with our colleague from Massachusetts, and his great-nephew, JOE KENNEDY.

The USS *John F. Kennedy*, nicknamed "Big John," was the only ship of her class and the last conventionally powered carrier built for the United States Navy. Since its first keel plates were laid down on October 22, 1964, at the Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company in Virginia, the ship grew weld by weld and deck by deck to its full magnitude—five city blocks in length, 252 feet across the flight deck, and the height of a 23-story building.

Big John was officially christened by President Kennedy's 9-year-old daughter, Caroline, on May 27, 1967, just two days short of what would have been President Kennedy's 50th birthday. Some 30,000 spectators gathered at the shipyard to witness the launching of the Navy's newest aircraft carrier. President Lyndon B. Johnson, delivering the principal address, was joined at the podium by members of the Kennedy family including Caroline, the Matron of Honor Jackie Kennedy, and a distinguished list of military and civilian officials.

As the bottle of champagne crashed across the bow with Caroline's swift blow, the ship floated free from the keel blocks that had supported her during years of construction. In that moment, Hull 577 became the mighty aircraft carrier USS *John F. Kennedy*. A little over a year later, the ship entered the fleet after being commissioned on September 7, 1968 with Captain Earl P. Yates in command.

The *Kennedy's* maiden voyage and several of her subsequent voyages were on deployments to the Mediterranean during the 1970s to help deal with the steadily deteriorating situation in the Middle East. It was during the seventies that Big John was upgraded to handle the F-14 Tomcat and the S-3 Viking. During her seventh deployment in 1978, *Kennedy* set a record of 31,568 flight hours and 12,438 arrested landings.

On January 4, 1982, Big John sailed as the flagship for Carrier Group 4 from Norfolk, Virginia on her ninth deployment and her first visit to the Indian Ocean. During her time there, the USS *John F. Kennedy* played host to the first visit of the Somali head of state aboard a U.S. Naval ship, held the largest mass re-enlistment ceremony in her history of-

ficiated by the Secretary of the Navy, and achieved her 150,000th arrested landing. Her cruise ended with port visits to Mombasa, Kenya and Toulon, France before returning home on July 14, 1982.

In October 1983, Big John was diverted to Beirut, Lebanon from her planned Indian Ocean deployment, after the Beirut barracks bombing killed 241 U.S. military personnel taking part in the Multinational Force in Lebanon, and spent the rest of that year and early 1984 patrolling the region. On December 4, 1983, ten A-6 aircraft from *Kennedy* along with A-6 and A-7 aircraft from USS *Independence* took part in a bombing raid over Beirut, in response to two U.S. F-14 aircraft being fired upon the previous day.

Setting sail in July 1986, *Kennedy* was the focus of the world when she served as the centerpiece of a vast international naval armada during the International Review in honor of the 100th anniversary and rededication of the Statue of Liberty. Big John hosted President Ronald Reagan and many other dignitaries during the review. *Kennedy* departed for the Mediterranean in August of that year, returning home in March 1987. During her November 1987 work ups, *Kennedy's* flight deck crew trapped their 200,000th arrested landing.

In August 1988, the USS *John F. Kennedy* departed Norfolk, Virginia for her 12th major deployment to the Mediterranean. During this deployment, a pair of MiG-23 Flogger fighter aircraft from Libya approached the carrier task force, which was 81 miles off the shores of Libya conducting routine flight operations in international water. Big John launched two F-14 Tomcats from the VF-32 "Fighting Swordsmen" to intercept the incoming MiGs and escort them away from the task force. During the course of the intercept, the MiGs were determined to be hostile and both Libyan aircrafts were shot down.

Big John entered the nineties eager to take on new challenges as part of America's commitment to help keep the world's oceans free for all nations. After spending the first half of 1990 participating in various exercises, the carrier paid a visit to New York City for Fleet Week and Boston for the Fourth of July—hosting more than 180,000 visitors.

In August of that year, the USS *John F. Kennedy* received short-fused orders to load up and get underway in support of Operation Desert Shield. Big John arrived in the Red Sea in September 1990 and was chosen as the flagship of the Commander, Red Sea Battle Force. On January 16, 1991, aircraft from the embarked air wing, Carrier Air Wing Three, began Operation Desert Storm as part of a multi-nation coalition to drive Iraq out of neighboring Kuwait. Throughout the war, aircraft from JFK flew 2,895 sorties and 114 strikes delivering over 3.5 million pounds of ordnance over 11,263 combat hours. Following the cease fire, Big John passed through the Suez Canal for the fourth time in seven months and began her journey home. When the carrier arrived home in Norfolk, Virginia on March 28, 1991, her crew was witness to the greatest homecoming celebration and outpouring of public support since World War II.

Big John's next deployment from October 7, 1992 until April 7, 1993 was her 14th to the Mediterranean Sea. This cruise was marked by the developing turmoil in the former country of Yugoslavia. Throughout the ship's deploy-

ment, the crew hosted many visitors, both in port and at sea, and conducted numerous joint exercises with armed forces from Mediterranean littoral nations and spent most of her time in the Adriatic Sea. She passed another milestone by logging her 250,000th arrested landing on December 8, 1992.

Following the deployment and a two-year comprehensive overhaul at Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, she was transferred to the Mayport Naval Station near Jacksonville, Florida, which remained the ship's home port. In October 1995, the USS *John F. Kennedy* was designated to be an operational reserve carrier and Naval Reserve Force ship with a combined full-time active duty and part-time Naval Reserve crew, assigned to the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. In this capacity, her new primary function was to provide a surge capability, and in peacetime, to support training requirements.

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, the Operational Reserve Carrier concept was discontinued and Big John was returned to the active duty fleet. Her 15th and 16th deployments included transits of the Suez Canal, operations in the Persian Gulf. There, she became the first U.S. aircraft carrier to make a port call in Al Aqabah, Jordan, while also playing host to the King of Jordan. During the first six months of 2002, Big John's aircraft dropped 31,000 tons of ordnance on Taliban and al Qaeda targets in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. On August 8th, the carrier passed through the Strait of Gibraltar and returned to Mayport Naval Station on August 17, 2002.

The USS *John F. Kennedy* deployed again in 2004 with Carrier Air Wing 17 and sailed east in support of the Global War on Terror. She passed through the Suez Canal and on July 10, 2004, launched her first aircraft in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, providing critical overhead support for Multi-National Corps—Iraq and Iraqi forces. During the deployment, CVW-17 aircraft flew 8,296 sorties for a total flight time of 21,824 hours. The veteran carrier and her air wing transited the Suez Canal, homeward-bound, in late November returning to Mayport Naval Station on December 13, 2004. On December 30th, a little over two weeks later, the U.S. Navy announced its intention to decommission the ship.

On March 23, 2007, the USS *John F. Kennedy* was decommissioned. She set sail on her last voyage at the end of a tow line in July of that year, setting course for the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, which she reached on August 1, 2007. The carrier was stricken from the Naval Vessel Register on October 16, 2009.

The 80,000 ton warship, namesake of the 35th President of the United States, saw 18 deployments and boasted 30 commanding officers in its illustrious 38 years of service. I commend all those who contributed to the legacy of this great ship—from its builders to the men and women in uniform who served aboard to keep our nation safe.

HONORING MS. HAWTHORN  
BOLGER-WITHERSPOON

**HON. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM**

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, April 10, 2018*

Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Ms.